

MEDIEVAL ODISHA

The Chalukya Dynasty: Mukunda Harichandan (1560-1568 CE)

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • July 5, 2017 • Updated June 6, 2024 • 8 min read



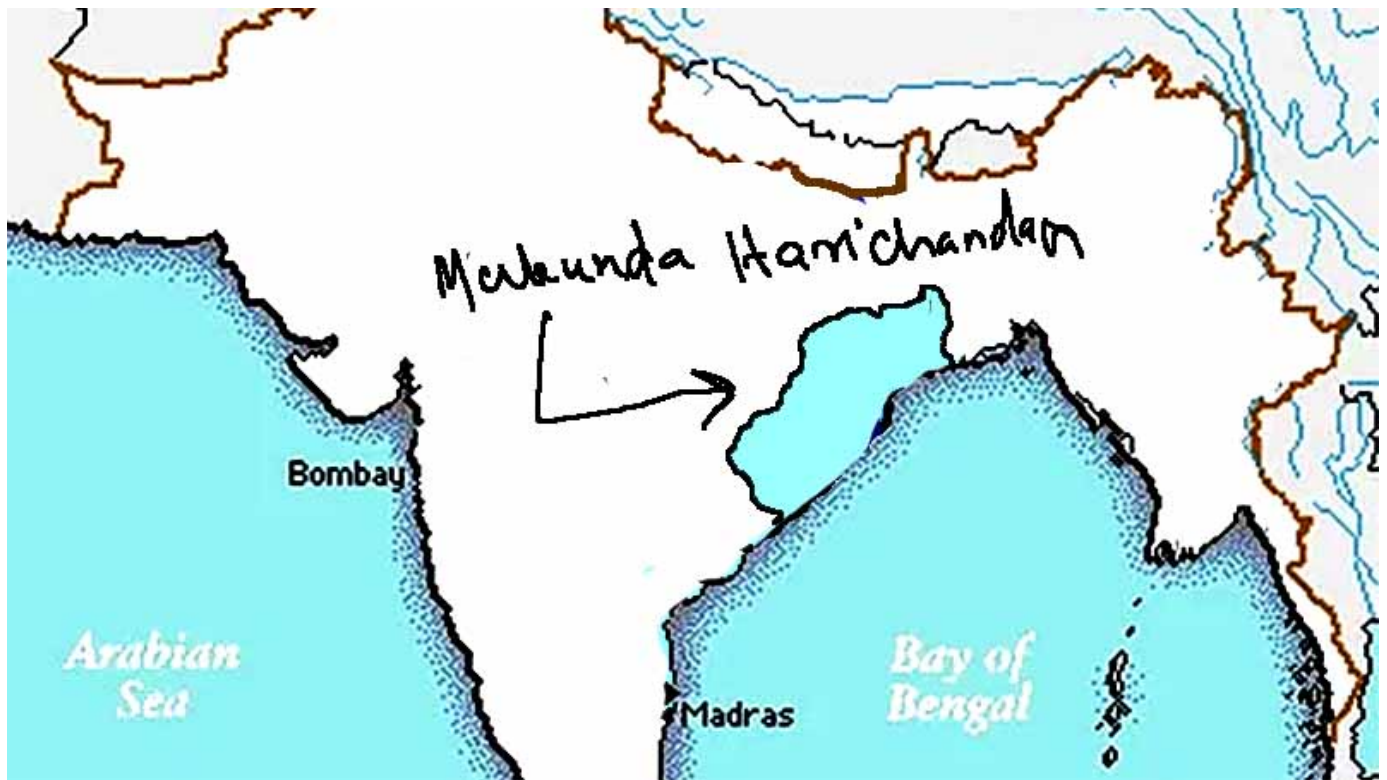


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Origin

Mukundadeva's dynasty was dubbed the Chalukya dynasty. He appears to have claimed descent from the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, a branch of the famous Western Chalukya dynasty of Vadami founded by Pulakesin II.

It is customary for Odisha's ruling dynasties to trace their origins to India's famous ruling dynasties. Mukundadeva may have done the same thing following his ascension to the Gajapati throne. However, there is no other independent evidence that he was a member of the Eastern Chalukya family. He is described as the son of Saravaraju and grandson of Singaraju in his inscription on the Bhimesvara temple at Draksharama in the East Godavari district.

Usruption to Throne

Mukundadeva is regarded as Odisha's last Hindu king. Mukundadeva is referred to as Telinga Mukundadeva in Odishan traditions. Ferishta mentions a feudatory dynasty known as the Bahuvalendras and Harichandanas ruling in the Visakhapatnam district's Sarvasidhi taluk. Mukundadeva may have been a member of this ruling family, which were originally feudatories of the Gajapati. Mukundadeva first gained prominence by defending the fort Kataka (Cuttack) from Raghubhanja Chhotaraya during the reign of Govinda Vidyadhara,

and his influence in Odisha politics has grown steadily since then.

Welfare Activities

Mukundadeva's inscription of Draksharama, as mentioned previously, clearly indicates that he controlled the southern part of the Gajapati kingdom up to the Godavari river. It states that Mukundadeva defeated the king of Gauda and then remitted marriage taxes after performing Tulapurusha (the ceremony of weighing against gold) and other ceremonies. This inscription establishes unequivocally that Mukundadeva's kingdom extended all the way to Triveni in the north prior to 1567 CE. The above epigraphical evidence is corroborated by a flight of steps built on the Ganges at Triveni (in the Hooghly district), which is still known as Mukunda-ghata. Prof. R. D. Banerjee states that Mukundadeva also constructed a large embankment on which the road from Magra to Triveni was laid and that the Oriyas continue to exert a significant influence in Triveni. Mukundadeva was thus an extremely capable ruler who succeeded in preserving the Gajapati empire's prestige to a large extent, despite the fact that he obtained the Gajapati throne through murder. The Odisha people continue to remember him with gratitude for restoring peace and prestige.

He did, however, become embroiled in Bengali politics, which ultimately cost him his life and throne. He made the grave error of sheltering Ibrahim Sur, a major adversary of Sulaiman Karrani, the Sultan of Bengal, and thus incurred his wrath. He added insult to injury by exchanging embassies with the great Mughal emperor Akbar. In 1566, Akbar CE. sent envoys to Mukundadeva's court, and Mukundadeva reciprocated by sending a Hindu ambassador named Paramananda Ray to the Mughal emperor's court. Akbar gained the upper hand in these diplomatic relations because his ultimate goal was to annex Bengal to his empire. He desired the assistance of the neighbouring Hindu kingdom of Odisha for this purpose. He was not, however, in favour of strengthening Mukundadeva's position, as evidenced by his refusal to assist the king of Odisha during his attack by Sulaiman Karrani.

Bengal's Invasion to Odisha

When the Sultan of Bengal invaded Odisha in 1568, Akbar was engaged in the siege of Chitor and offered no assistance to the Odishan king, most likely to ensure that Odisha became a part of Bengal and that he would eventually annex Bengal with Odisha.

Mukundadeva was attacked in 1568 CE by Sulaiman Karrani, who dispatched an expedition led by his son Bayazid and aided by Sikandar Uzbeg and Kalapahara. The Bengal army marched through Dhalbhum and Mayurbhanj, eventually arriving in the coastal strip. Mukundadeva was unprepared for the invasion and entrusted Raghubhanja Chhotaraya with the task of repelling the invaders. This Raghubhanja appears to be the same person who was imprisoned by Govinda Vidyadhara for attempting to claim the Gajapati throne. He appears to have been released from prison and assigned to oppose the invading army by Mukundadeva. However, he was unable to complete the mission entrusted to him, and the Bengal army inexorably reached Kataka (Cuttack). Mukundadeva had no choice but to submit to the invaders, as Raghubhanja appears to have betrayed him at this point.

Various accounts of the Muslim invasion of 1568 CE have been given in our sources.

According to the Madalapanji, Odisha was invaded by two distinct Bengali armies, one of which fought against Mukundadeva on the banks of the Ganges, while the other marched under Bayazid and Kalapahara towards Mukundadeva's capital at Kataka (Cuttack).

Mukundadeva fought valiantly against the Muslim army but was eventually forced to seek refuge in the fort of Kotisami, which has been identified as Kotsimul on the western bank of the river Damodara in Bengal's Hooghly district. Bayazid's other army reached Kataka, which was then commanded by Koni Samanta Simhara, who fought valiantly against the invaders but was assassinated. Ramachandra Bhanja, the commadant of Sarangagarh, declared himself king of Odisha at this time. Mukundadeva learned of all these developments in Odisha and rushed to Kataka, but he was forced to submit to the invader due to Ramachandra Bhanja's rebellion. Mukundadeva then suppressed the rebellion at Sarangagarh (near Baranga), but Ramachandra assassinated him in the ensuing fight. On the same day, Ramachandra was assassinated by the invaders.

Mukundadeva is also said to have fought alongside the invading army at Gohiratikari (near Jajpur) and was killed in the battle. Another tradition mentions two traitors, Sikhi and Manai, who were Odisha's king's generals. These traitors pointed out a jungle path to Kalapahara, who ambushed and routed Mukundadeva's army. Thus, there are numerous accounts of Mukundadeva's demise. However, it is most likely that he was assassinated by traitor Ramachandra Bhanja. This traitor has been referred to in the Madalapanji as Ramachandra Bhanja and Ramachandradeva. The latter appears to be the more accurate name. He was a local chief who had been assigned responsibility for the fort of Sarangagarh. The Muslim army occupied Odisha following the fall of the important forts of Kataka and Sarangagarh.

Story of Kalapahada

Our account of the Muslim conquest of Odisha would be incomplete without mentioning Kalapahara's desecration of the Jagannath temple in Puri. According to the Madalapanji, when the temple's servants learned of Kataka's demise, they removed the images of Lord Jagannatha and his associates from the temple and hid them on an island in the Chilka lake, but Kalapahara detected the scent. He then proceeded to Bengal, where he burned the images on the banks of the Ganges. Bishar Mahanti, a Vaishnava devotee, followed Kalapahara to the location where the images were burned and recovered the Brahmas (likely jewels) inside the images, placed them inside a mridanga (a type of drum), and returned them to Odisha.

Kalapahara, according to the same chronicle, destroyed the great Jagannatha temple up to Amalakasila and defaced the images. It is difficult to verify the truth of the statement because the temple has been covered in a thick coat of plaster that conceals evidence of destruction and disfigurement, but it appears to us that the temple was not demolished or razed to the ground, even though the images were damaged and disfigured to the maximum extent possible. There is no evidence that the temple was rebuilt at any point in time. The original Chodaganga temple has been passed down to us, though the carvings on the temple's outer faces have been damaged and disfigured. Kalapahara is also depicted as the destroyer of a number of other Odia's Hindu monuments. Indeed, Kalapahara is a well-

known figure in Odisha, and all damage to Hindu temples and images, regardless of their age, is attributed to him. While it is true that Kalapahara destroyed a large number of Hindu monuments in Odisha, it is not true that he went to every nook and cranny of the state with the express purpose of destroying them. According to Bengali legend, Kalapahara was originally a Hindu Brahmin. Dulari, the Bengal Sultan's daughter, fell in love with him and eventually married him. Kalapahara was married to two Hindu women and intended to remain a Hindu despite marrying a Muslim girl. He came to Puri to perform the expiation ceremony in the Jagannatha temple, but the Brahmins refused to allow him to do so. Kalapahara's reaction was extremely strong, and as a result, he developed into a great fanatic. Scholars, however, have contested this tradition. The term Kalapahara was not unique to Hindus. This name was given to a nephew of Bahalul Lodi. According to Mr. P. Mukherji, "the Muslim chronicles conclusively establish that Kalapahara was a full-blooded Afghan, not a Brahmin renegade."

To Conclude

Thus, Mukundadeva ruled for only eight years, but during this brief period, he demonstrated extraordinary abilities. He regained control of the Gajapati kingdom, which stretched from the Ganges to the Godavari. The people of Odisha continue to remember him as the inventor of Brahmin Sasanas and the architect of several structures within the compound of the Jagannatha temple in Puri. Additionally, he was a patron of the arts and literature. Foreign travellers such as Saesare Fredericke and Tieffenthaler sing his praises. All of these evidences demonstrate that Odisha's last Hindu king was a great warrior and statesman.

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